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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000462

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY'S OWN "24" -- "VALLEY OF THE WOLVES"

REF: 06 ANKARA 783

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4(b),(d)
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1.(C) Summary: "Show TV" cenceviolence. End summary.

Cancellation of Series Sparks Censorship Debate

2.(C) Turkish television network Show TV canceled its popular television drama "The Valley of the Wolves" on February 15, after a storm of public criticism over the program's excessive violence. The series, which follows the shady dealings between the state and the right-wing mafia, became immensely popular after it first aired in 2004, and led to the controversial blockbuster 2005 movie spin-off "Valley of the Wolves, Iraq." (see reftel). RTUK's Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Nurulla Ozturk told us that as Show TV prepared to launch the third season, over 16,000 viewers complained to RTUK about the program's violence. Show TV had instructed that complaints be directed to RTUK. Complaints continued to flood in after Show TV aired the first episode, which drew over 30 million viewers. When viewers tuned in to see the second episode, they saw a message from producer "Pana Film" that they had decided to cancel the program. A backlash ensued, as tens of thousands of viewers called RTUK to protest the cancellation and picketed RTUK's Istanbul office.

3.(U) In the debate over whether RTUK had censored the program, normally uncompromising free speech advocates called on the government to cancel the program, while those who often advocate more stringent restrictions on speech labeled cancellation of the show a freedom of speech violation. Representative of those supporting cancellation, Istanbul University Communications Professor Suat Gezgin said if the show had a violent effect on children it was not censorship to cancel it. In contrast, Free Party Chairman Yasar Okuyan stated, "The cancellation of the show could only be possible in Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia."

GOT Regulatory Body Denies Censorship

4.(C) RTUK's Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Nurulla Ozturk emphatically denied that any censorship had taken place. He told us that, while RTUK can issue fines after a regulation has been violated, under Turkish law it may not participate in restraint of speech. RTUK had met with Show TV executives to share long-standing concerns that "Wolves" could negatively influence youth's behavior. RTUK had conducted

several studies on violence in the media that suggested such a link, and was particularly concerned with results that showed Turkish youths saw the "Wolves" main character Polat as a role model. RTUK explained to Show TV its fear that scenes of violence and an emphasis on a "crude type of nationalism" could lead to dangerous consequences, such as the recent murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink by an ultranationalist youth. RTUK urged Show TV to act responsibly. RTUK's philosophy was that prevention was better than searching for a cure after another such incident occurred.

5.(C) Ozturk downplayed the significance of the show's cancellation. He said there was little controversy when, during the program's first season, RTUK and several academics expressed concerns to Show TV about the violence. Show TV

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pulled the series but another station, Kanal D, then picked it up. Ozturk said nothing prevented producer Pana Film from airing the program on another channel, the internet, or in movie theaters. Pointing to the debate in the U.S. regarding whether the immensely popular show "24" adversely affects the behavior of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said discussions of how to regulate TV violence are common in a democracy. Ozturk attributed the "overblown" current controversy to the tense atmosphere leading up to the presidential election this spring.

Public Supports Show but Legal Community Split

6.(U) Nearly one million people took part in an internet poll on the series sponsored by a mainstream newspaper. Eighty-eight percent of respondents labeled the cancellation censorship and said the series should be shown. Meanwhile, Turkey's legal community is split. A three-day poll conducted by Turkey's Justice Assuse they fing the show and 2.61 percent strongly opposed the ban. Thirty-five percent declined to respond.

7.(C) Comment: The "Valley of the Wolves" debate has caused many academics, columnists, and parliamentarians to take uncharacteristic positions: usual defenders of free speech have called on the government to cancel the program, while those who often advocate stringent restrictions on speech have labeled cancellation a freedom of speech violation. While a large majority of Turks, attracted to the show's nationalistic themes, favors keeping the series on the air, the show's popularity has ensured a healthy, if spirited, national debate on censorship and TV violence. End comment.

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